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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0151  
INFO RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001025

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/19/2016

TAGS: PREL KUNR PHUM RS

SUBJECT: MFA HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICIAL ON REGULARIZING TIES, UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Classified By: A/POL Bruce Donahue. Reasons: 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a January 18 meeting, A/S Lowenkron and Vladimir Parshikov, Director of the MFA Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, agreed to more frequent consultations. Lowenkron laid out the USG position on the UN Human Rights Council, and Parshikov responded that the GOR favored finding consensus, including by accommodating regional groups, before moving forward on the issue. The GOR also favored a Council roughly the size of the current one, favored a simple majority vote to elect Council members, and was cool to the idea of country-specific resolutions.

Lowenkron underscored the importance of NGOs, and Parshikov argued that Russia was moving in the right direction on democratic development. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A/S Barry Lowenkron held an introductory meeting January 18 with Vladimir Parshikov, Director of the MFA Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, as well as with his deputy, Grigoriy Lukyansev. Parshikov reported that his department has six sections, as follows:

-- universal cooperation on human rights, including the UN's Third Committee on Human Rights, the UN's Human Rights Committee "and hopefully, the Human Rights Council";  
-- social development in the UN and European structures;  
-- cooperation on human rights in European institutions, including the Council of Europe and OSCE;  
-- migrants and refugees;  
-- human rights in the CIS, notably in the Baltic states; and  
-- international cooperation on culture, sports and leisure.

¶3. (C) Parshikov noted that his department had last held regular meetings with its State Department counterparts in 1997. He and Lowenkron agreed to resume a regularized dialogue, with Lowenkron suggesting that Parshikov visit Washington next year as part of that effort.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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¶4. (C) Lowenkron laid out the U.S. position with regard to the Human Rights Council, underscoring the importance of having a smaller body than the Commission, meeting more frequently than the Commission's once-a-year sessions and establishing a higher bar on membership. The USG was deeply committed to the issue, and the U.S. Congress was keen to see genuine reform.

¶5. (C) Parshikov agreed that the current arrangement did not serve anyone's interests and said the GOR favored reform of the UN's human rights structure as soon as possible. Given the range of views in the international community about how to proceed, however, the GOR believed it was important to accommodate regional groups while still pushing ahead with reforms. The U.S. position did not enjoy the support of even

the Western group, Parshikov argued. Noting that General Assembly President Eliasson was working hard on the issue and had called for resolving it by February, Parshikov doubted that that would occur so soon. That being the case, the current Commission would meet again before a consensus could be pinned down on the Council.

¶ 16. (C) Elaborating on Parshikov's points, Lukyantsev reiterated that the GOR favored reform but felt that it should be done by full or at least partial consensus. Both the GOR and USG based their positions on principles, but both might have to make compromises. Rumors that a vote might take place before a consensus could be hammered out worried the GOR, Lukyantsev continued.

¶ 17. (C) From the GOR's perspective, for instance, consensus was needed on the Council's composition. Because the Council would deal with "universal questions," it should not be too small. Twenty to thirty members were too few, and the right number was closer to the current fifty-one, Lukyantsev argued, with the GOR prepared to accept something as low as forty-eight. Geographical balance was also important.

¶ 18. (C) Consensus was also needed on the process of selecting members, Lukyantsev argued. The GOR believed that in the interests of fairness and balance, a simple majority vote was appropriate rather than the two-thirds favored by the U.S. Lukyantsev added that instituting a two-third vote would ensure that countries like Cuba and China would become Council members but could keep the U.S. out of the Council. Lowenkron responded that the USG recognized that but was ready to take its chances regarding membership, since establishing a strong Council was more pivotal. Over the long-term, a two-thirds vote coupled with a smaller Council (and other selection procedures) would reduce the likelihood

MOSCOW 00001025 002 OF 002

of non-democratic countries joining the Council. Lukyanov agreed that that would be the case theoretically but expressed doubt about the practicality of such an approach.

¶ 19. (C) Discussion then turned to the issue of country-specific resolutions. Lowenkron stressed that for introducing such resolutions, the USG would not accept requiring a two-thirds vote; this was a red line for us. Lukyantsev said that the GOR was not even considering a two-thirds vote requirement on that issue, but was considering the proposal that only regional groupings could offer country-specific resolutions regarding countries in their regions. More generally, however, the GOR questioned the merit of country-specific resolutions, Parshikov added, since these tended only to serve a public relations role. For example, rather than criticize the Baltic States individually for their treatment of ethnic Russians, the GOR preferred to do so in the context of a thematic resolution on racism or ethnic discrimination. Lowenkron responded that the Council could allow for both country-specific and thematic resolutions. If the UN created an effective Council that would meet often, it could take up country-specific resolutions that had teeth and could thus be valuable. Parshikov commented that the most recent country-specific resolution on Cuba had been extremely mild; if the UN had passed a resolution adopting that tone regarding Chechnya, even the GOR would have supported it.

DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA - NGO LAW

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¶ 10. (C) Lowenkron noted that both the U.S. Congress and American NGOs were concerned about the new Russian NGO law. Parshikov responded that the GOR had its own parliament and NGOs to answer to on the issue. The media also weighed in, Parshikov continued. It was not true that Russia was moving away from democracy, he argued, and there were many voices heard on all issues.

¶11. (C) Lowenkron said that soon after assuming his current position, he had met with a cross section of NGOs. He had promised them that he was always prepared for a dialogue with them, even if he would not always agree with their views. Throughout the world, NGOs are a reality and are here to stay, Lowenkron emphasized.

¶12. (C) Parshikov responded that the GOR also aimed to create civil society. Russia was a young democracy and faced challenges in achieving this goal, he continued, although the country was on the right track. Lowenkron replied that the Secretary viewed movement on democracy as a trajectory rather

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than a snap-shot. In that spirit, we needed to have a dialogue on Russia's trajectory. Parshikov agreed on the need for a dialogue, but added that it should be between equal partners. The U.S., being a more mature democracy, had the right to share its experiences with Russia but not to dictate to it. Lowenkron stressed that the U.S. was not dictating change to Russia, underscoring the Secretary's view that democracy by its definition cannot be imposed from the outside.

¶13. (U) A/S Lowenkron has cleared this cable.

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